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CONSIDERATIONS ON REFORM;

WITH

A SPECIFIC PLAN

FOR

A NEW REPRESENTATION,

ADDRESSED TO

CHARLES GREY, Esq.

68 Member of Parliament for Northumberland,

By MILES POPPLE,

Late Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge,

LONDON:

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M, Dec, 1831.

[Sensible that from a paper drawn up, not at leisure, but on the emergency of the occasion, credit might be lost, but not acquired, the Writer of the following Letter had determined to suppress his name; but reflecting afterwards more seriously, on the singular feature of the times, the important object in contemplation, the little regard paid in general to anonymous publications, and the peculiar misconstruction to which, at this period, they are liable, he felt it to be an indispensable duty, not to do injury to a good cause, by appearing to shrink from an open discussion.]



CONSIDERATIONS, &c.

SIR,

THOUGH I can claim no greater intimacy than a mere college-acquaintance, and that almost as transient as those formed at a watering place, I should yet feel no small mortification, could I suppose myself either entirely out of your remembrance, or capable of assuming the liberty which I now do, on no better a foundation. But the great and decided part which you support in public life, whilst in every other respect it increases the distance between us, authorizes me to address you with freedom upon any matter of general concern. With still more propriety may I do it on the

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subject

subject of a parliamentary reform, as all, who are desirous that our Constitution should be carried to this high point of improvement, naturally look up to you, as the person most likely, from the union of zeal and abilities, to give effect to their wishes. The step which I am taking acquires also a farther sanction by considering the tenor of the proceedings on a late occasion at Merchant Taylor's Hall. From the temper of the few speeches which were then delivered, and the manner in which the incidental reference to the present state of representation was received, it manifestly appeared that the general sentiment of that very respectable meeting was in unison with the association of the friends of the people, I mean as far as to the necessity of some reform, whatever difference of opinion might subsist respecting the time and mode.

Since then this object can no longer be regarded as a phantom of visionary theorists, it becomes the duty of all who are convinced of its importance to contribute whatever they judge may lead to its attainment. With this view, the scheme, the outlines of which I have sketched at the close of this letter, is submitted

mitted to your consideration. But, should it, on examining its various parts and dependencies, prove too chimerical for execution, deficient in more than one essential point, or pregnant with some latent inconvenience, still as it is from a variety of plans and the facility of comparison that the best possible is most likely to result, it may, in concurrence with others alike rejected, tend to give a greater perfection to that which shall be finally adopted.

Whatever, Sir, may be the excellency of our Constitution, and great it assuredly is, it cannot be really believed, by the most passionate admirers of ancient and hereditary abuses, either to have derived or to maintain this superiority from an imperfect representation of the people. It is much more reasonable to suppose, that the greater extension of liberty in this Island is owing to the sense of the people being more clearly expressed under our form of government, than that of any other prior to the American revolution. Such too, I am confident, is the prevailing opinion of the nation; and I am equally persuaded that all other modes of reform, than that under our

present contemplation, are merely palliatives and temporary expedients ; but that, were the national sense once fully collected in Parliament, the removal of every grievance would follow of course and without any disorder ; for there could then be no variance between the constituent and the representative body, and the expression of the general will would, as it ought, be uniformly obeyed, not from either the fear or the impulse of violence, but from an inseparable union of interests.

Of the frequent and wide difference in the present state of representation, between the resolutions of parliament and the sentiments of the people at large, very recent events furnish abundant testimony. Out of a variety of instances which crowd upon the recollection, it is sufficient to mention the American war, not indeed begun, but long persevered in, contrary to the wishes of the nation ; and the late Russian armament, dissolved almost as soon as it was formed, notwithstanding a majority in both Houses had voted an address of thanks to his Majesty, for his gracious communication on the subject, and declared their firm determination to support so just and necessary

cessary a measure. That the harmony between the legislature and the people is not constantly interrupted, arises not so much from a community of interests, as from the freedom of debate aided by the freedom of the press, which together stem the corrupt tide of influence, and shame men into honesty.

To this freedom of discussion, Sir, both in and out of parliament, I am bold to say, we must look for the origin and security of almost all the blessings and privileges which we enjoy. No corrupt establishment can stand against its attacks, no good one need to fear them. And the greater or less degree of liberty allowed in canvassing the merits of any institution, forms perhaps the best standard for appreciating its value. For it is not excellencies, but defects and corruptions, which are so tremblingly alive as to shrink from all enquiry. It was when the church was marked with the grossest vices and most degrading superstition, that the exercise of private judgment upon its abuses was forbidden: nor did religion resume its purity till heresy began to spread, for that or some harsher name is given to all novel opinions, whether true or false; and, be the subject what
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it may, morals, politics, or divinity. It was at the time also when prerogative was carried to its highest pitch, and when England was on the brink of sinking under the same despotism, which then involved almost the whole of Europe, that allegiance was holden to consist in passive obedience; and that the doctrine was promulged from the throne, and re-echoed from the pulpit, that the actions of Monarchs and the principles of Government, were matters too sacred to be meddled with by subjects. But assailed by the reasonings of Milton, Sydney, Locke, and men of a like expansion of thought, this delusion, this medley craft, though supported by the arm of temporal power, and the usurped terrors of another world, gradually crumbled away. The theories and writings of these great men, and of those who have trodden in their steps, have insensibly wrought a revolution in the minds of the human race, and are continually infusing a portion of their spirit into our Constitution. The last striking operation of these principles was, when supported by the mild virtue of Camden, which has passed untainted through the ordeal of corruption, and enforced

forced by the sublime patriotism of Fox, a man, whose temper no desertion of friends has soured, whose activity in the public cause the most untoward events have not abated, they triumphed over the encroachment of precedents, and obtained the declaratory law of the right of juries to determine, in indictments for libels, upon the guilt, as well as the mere act of publishing—May their next victory be a Reform of Parliament !

But to this it cannot be denied that many are averse, and, were such the sentiments of the majority, no actual change ought to be introduced. Still the right of enquiring into the source, nature, and remedy, of this or any other abuse would remain in its utmost extent. For as the faculty of thinking lies not within the province of human control, so any attempt to suppress the communication of thought upon subjects not of a personal nature, nor subversive of Government, is the extreme of tyranny *, and a branch of a system most ex-

* Et sicut vetus ætas vidit, quid ultimum in libertate esset, ita nos, quid in servitute, adempto per inquisitiones & loquendi audiendique commercio.

Tac. Vit. Agric.

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quisitely adapted to level all distinctions. For what is its tendency, but to render man, the grand character of whose species consists in being continually progressive, no less stationary than the inferior tenants of this globe, in whom all improvement begins and terminates with the individual? In the ferment of prejudice and passion we may forget this, as we do other sacred truths, but when it comes home to ourselves we acknowledge its justice; nor is it too rash to assert, that the same men, who are now most forward to condemn the licentious spirit of investigation, which they say has gone forth, would loudly complain of the outrage of that Government, which should impose silence upon *their* opinions, and not allow them full latitude of invective against those, whose reasonings lead them to conclusions different from their own. Let us then avail ourselves of this right, and use it with freedom, but without intemperance, to examine the causes of the aversion just stated. Perhaps we may discover that they are neither very serious, nor very general.

The foremost amongst the opposers of a parliamentary reform are such as conceive that
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the people in general, though they possess not the actual right of election, are yet to every efficient purpose virtually represented. The partizans of this opinion, however, must and do continually diminish, as the progress of enquiry points out more distinctly its inconsistency with facts. To display this discordancy in its full magnitude, it would be requisite to trace the several steps by which the national debt has risen to its present height, to assign the respective portions to be severally placed to the support of the common good, to the prosecution of schemes of aggrandizement, in which the people have had no interest or one directly opposite; and lastly, to the ambition and avarice of Ministers, rendered by loans, pensions, and contracts amenable only to a nominal control, except in the hour of public distress. But without entering into so large a field, it is sufficient for the conviction of any person who will think at all to refer to what has been already stated, the numerous instances of a contrariety of sentiments between the representative body, and those who are, or ought to be, the constituents; and to consider this difference as permanently displayed in the marriage act,

the game laws, and others of a particular spirit, which it would not be difficult to adduce.

There is another set of men somewhat allied in sentiment to those whom I have just described, but not so respectable, who contend that the very attainment of a reform would produce no advantage, inasmuch as in every situation, and under all circumstances, men will be corrupt, and Government must be conducted upon this principle. With persons who think thus meanly of their own species, and would yet resent as a personal affront the being charged individually with a readiness to barter the interests of their country for titles or for gold, it is impossible to argue. It must be to them a matter of indifference under what form of Government they live, so long as they have a share in dividing the spoil. Still it cannot be improper to suggest to both these classes of advocates for a perpetuity of the present corruptions, that something further is necessary than that the representation be the result of a partial number of votes, or even of the general voice; that the morals of the electors are an object of national consideration, and that

that the conduct of the representative himself may be expected to be very different, according as he derives his seat from purchase or corruption, or from the unbought esteem of his constituents.

If from those who disapprove a reform, we pass to such as are indifferent and inactive about it, we shall find them also to be of two descriptions. The first includes all who are sunk in despondency, from witnessing the total abandonment of the principle by the very men, who, upon their first entrance into public life, had solemnly and voluntarily devoted themselves to its support in whatever situation they might be placed. What shall we say? That the intemperate sallies of youthful enthusiasm have been sobered by more mature experience; or is there an over-ruling influence, to which, after a few struggles, the most patriot Minister finds it prudent to submit? But, though the prospect at this moment is overcast, I could yet wish to remind such as are ready to give up the cause, not from dislike, but despair, that as far as a conjecture can be made of the present purity of intention, and the future consistency of

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conduct,

conduct, from comparing the line pursued on the great theatre of political action with the character brought from school and college ; the same reliance may be placed on the efforts of those who now take the lead in this business, as on the firmness and integrity of Wilberforce for the abolition of the slave trade.

The other class, Sir, is equally well disposed to advance the grand object of our wishes, but their faculties are overpowered by that bugbear, Innovation ; and they are planet struck upon being ranked, however unjustly, with Levelers, Jacobins, and Republicans. To call hard names is the constant resource of those, who like not the toil, or possess not the power of argument. But thus to confound every attempt to correct, with a desire to subvert, betrays a weak judgement or a corrupt motive.

I confess, Sir, that to me it seems possible to love the Constitution without being enamoured of its defects. Neither can I discover any want either of a rational or cordial attachment, in attempting a gradual and parliamentary redress of every grievance, or in concurring to remove its deformities, rather than behold, unconcerned, such an accumulation of rubbish from

from the mere lapse of time, as could not be swept away without hazarding the demolition of the whole fabric.

Here, then, let France, while we disclaim her as a model, furnish us with a lesson of instruction : And, as we contemplate with a mixture of horror and pity, the calamities which have been poured upon that country, let us carefully trace the causes which have led to the dissolution of all the parts of her Government. The principal will appear to be the great and unequal pressure of taxes, and a blind and obstinate adherence to ancient usages without regard to their propriety, or the change of sentiment, to which the diffusion of knowledge, the extension of commerce, and the revolution in the new world had given birth. If this be a true statement, to the Association of the Friends of the People are we to look not only for the amendment but the preservation of our present Constitution ; to those who would rectify, while the voice of reason can be heard, whatever is faulty and dangerous, rather than defer it to that season of tumult, when every concession being considered

sidered as extorted, loses the quality of a favour, and only opens the way to fresh and unreasonable demands.

But the advocates for a Reform of Parliament are not singular in being thus aspersed. All who venture to point out abuses in any other department, and to propose a remedy, are treated with the same unqualified terms of reproach, and with as little regard to decency and truth. A sour discontent and factious spirit have been ascribed very plentifully to those who have urged a repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, or who have recommended a revival of the liturgy and the terms of admission into the church. Equally hard is the fate of such as have complained of the extreme length and expence of all legal proceedings, as entailing litigations, and virtually defeating the great end of justice, however impartially administered. Nor have those friends of humanity, who have exerted themselves so nobly to abolish the traffic in our own species, been exempted from the general calumny of being men, who in the wildness of their fancies; would turn the world upside down; a calumny levelled indiscriminately against all, to
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whose feelings and sentiments no prescription or precedent can reconcile what is wrong or oppressive *.

And yet, for instance, it is not easy to conceive what enmity is betrayed towards the ecclesiastical establishment, in proposing not to abolish, but to commute tythes; nor how the interests of religion would be less effectually secured, by annexing the incomes of the Deaneries and Prebends, as they dropped, to the augmentation of small livings, and by enforcing residence universally, and almost without any other exception than that of ill health. Motions of such a tendency would cast no discredit upon the most venerable bench, would excite no alarm in the country, nor lessen either the revenues or influence of the Clergy. An equal share of ingenuity is shewn in discovering a disaffection to the civil establish-

* Curious it is to observe with what composure an enlightened European, who acknowledges the universal obligation of that rule, "To do unto others as he would have done unto himself," can systematically deal in human flesh; and at the same time with what horror he speaks of the occasional depredations of a Barbary Corsair, and how feelingly he can lament the lot of a poor Christian carried into slavery by a hard-hearted infidel.

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ment, though men declare the possessions of the individual to be sacred and inviolable, merely because they state, that the accumulation of property, in a few hands, is an evil which Government should rather endeavour to counteract than encourage; and, consistently with such notions, make no scruple of condemning the marriage act, the laws of entail, and the continuing the present distinction between the descent of real and personal estates now, when land, without being collected into large masses, is sufficiently protected from the ruffian hand of violence *.

But, Sir, after being thus desultory, yet, without wandering very far from the principal subject of this letter, I must, in compliance

* *Quære.* Whether, as far as relates to wills and descent, if all property, whether freehold, copyhold, or personal, were considered as of the same nature, and were the power of entail and contingent remainders still further limited, it might not be possible to contrive certain forms of bequest, similar to those printed ones adopted in most hospitals, or whether they might not, by the aid of Parliament, be made equally publick, and in a variety of cases of as easy application? And, were a person to die intestate, or not comply with these forms, could there be any injustice in the law making an equal distribution of the property, whatever were its nature and quality, amongst those who stood in the same degree of relation with a reserve for the rights of the widow?

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with the fashion of the day, trespass a little further, and to free myself, if possible, from the imputation of political heresy, make my confession of faith. Besides, I would not wantonly incur the displeasure of those societies, who seem prepared to make a sacrifice of the liberty of the press, and have combined to prosecute collectively any individual whose writings, they shall deem libellous or seditious.

Yet, permit me first to vindicate many worthy and good characters who are stigmatized as Republicans and Levellers, because they have conceived theories of government more perfect in their apprehensions than any which have hitherto been reduced to practice. But, in wishing all governments, by insensible degrees, to be brought nearer to the standard formed in their own minds, so far are they from designing to overturn those which already subsist, that they disapprove of every alteration, to which the tide of general opinion runs in an opposite direction. Those who have gone the greatest lengths, (I would be understood to speak of such, as coolly consider, not rashly innovate, men of the stamp of Mackintosh

and Christie), while they are uniform in condemning all exclusive privileges, as founded on a partial and narrow basis, yet, maintain that not any, however discordant with their ideal perfection of society, should be done away without a full compensation to the present possessors, whose title to these distinctions, like that to every other species of property, is derived from the sanction of existing laws, and the gradual progress of civilization. Equally enemies with those who censure them to that wild equality, where all are rulers and none are subjects, they would still have every department thrown open, without any exception in favour of birth or fortune, to the personal qualities of virtue, talents, and industry, stamped by the approbation of their fellow-citizens. The object of their admiration is not, as has been often falsely stated, the tumultuous assemblies of Greece or Rome, nor the less turbulent but more arbitrary republics of Genoa or Venice. What they appear to contend for, is neither democracy, nor aristocracy, nor any compound of the two, but a system as remote from any of these, as Monarchy itself; a

system entirely unknown to the Ancients, and of which this country exhibited the first model; a system of perfect representation, and in which the legislative, judicial, and executive powers should be kept completely distinct, while the abuse of each should be guarded against by defining their precise extent and duration. And here it may be remarked, that, abstractedly considered, and without reference to prior institutions and established habits, governments are excellent, not from being of this or that particular form, simple or mixt, but as they are calculated to preserve the separation, and prevent the abuse of the three powers just mentioned. The Constitution of England has, in this respect, reached a degree of perfection vastly surpassing any that had appeared before. And, in the opinion of some, though yet of necessity unsanctioned by experience, America setting off from the point at which we, by slow degrees, and through many struggles, have arrived, has advanced, at a single step, far beyond us. Of France, which still remains a disorganized chaos, no probable con-

jecture can be formed, and many years must elapse before it will furnish a basis of solid reasoning.

After thus venturing, Sir, to encounter the chimeras of popular delusion, or ministerial artifice, I feel almost hardy enough to plead the desperate cause of philosophy, of her, who, though revered in ancient times as a divinity, and by Cicero addressed in that noble apostrophe, "*Tu inventrix legum, tu magistra morum ac disciplinæ,*" has yet, at the close of the eighteenth century, been consigned to general detestation as the foul fiend and demon of anarchy. If allowed, amidst the general obloquy, to stand forward in her defence, I would ask whether the great mass of mankind (the swinish multitude of Burke, but formed, if we may trust to higher authority, in the image of their Creator,) and without leisure, capacity, or instruction, for searching into the principles of government, or the conduct of governors, has a fairer prospect of political happiness and security, from being left at the mercy of brute force, or under the regulation of power enlightened by

by science, and kept in one contemplative vigilance. To decide the controversy, I would bring into the same point of view the despotism of Asia, where there are no philosophers, and the Monarchies of Europe, some of which attuned by the general diffusion and continued influence of knowledge, may be put in competition with the most boasted of the ancient republics. I would next contrast the gigantic but capricious policy of the Czar Peter, just emerging from savage ignorance, with the resigned legislation of the Great Frederic, himself a man of letters, the friend and companion of Voltaire and others of that school, which set no bounds to the wantonness of speculation. The existence of false philosophy I could not deny, and would seriously deplore. But the same reverence for truth, would oblige me to remark how narrow was her sphere of action, and how harmless her weapons, when compared with the influence and power to hurt possessed by false religion. For where are the legions ready to start up on a stamp of her foot? Or what sensual delights has she in reversion for her deluded followers and martyrs?

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But, Sir, I am far from meaning, by this digression, to evade a declaration of my sentiments ; I rather feel it the more necessary, by having offered, from a sense of the persecution which they suffer, an apology for those with whom I can only partially concur. My political creed, then, you may judge is not very different from your own, and that of others, who neither blindly censure, nor ignorantly admire. I reverence and would defend the Constitution from every rude attack, from all secret as well as open violence, not from a notion of its being absolutely perfect, but from the conviction of its being practically good ; because too, that it has, with very few interruptions, been continually progressive, and is also further capable, (by infusing fresh vigour into the principle on which it depends) of every requisite improvement. It rests even on firmer ground than its goodness. It is congenial to the feelings of the nation ; and according to the general sense, every institution of man ought to stand or fall. The doctrines of the Reformation were no less true in the days of Wickliffe, than in the present ; but to have made them the basis of the national religion at
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that period, when the sentiments of the age were so widely different, had been equally cruel and unjust. It is the same with any other system: While those who live under it are not dissatisfied, all endeavours to subvert it by force, violate the very first principle of society, that express or implied consent, which forms the only legal groundwork of Government. Were even the great object of "the Friends of the People," a Reform of Parliament, holden in no regard by those in whose behalf they have stepped forwards, their attempts ought not to proceed beyond reasoning and enquiry. But mere acquiescence is of itself no proof of approbation. For on that principle we must conclude that the North of Europe is charmed with the philanthropic spirit of despotism; because, at present, the inhabitants dare not or cannot resist the tyranny which oppresses them.

But how far the wishes of the people go with the association, may best be judged from recurring to the complexion of those who are either averse or indifferent to a Reform. The opposition we found to be confined to such as maintain, without evidence, the efficiency of the

the present représentation, or who consider all forms as equally liable to corruption : The inaction appeared the result of accidental dependency, or artificial alarm.

But it must not be dissembled that there is another set of men who stand aloft, highly respectable, both in point of numbers and moderation of sentiment ; such, I mean, as from the dread of the hazard attendant upon a change, are disposed to acquiesce in what they are sensible is an evil of encreasing and portentous magnitude. A great and adequate reform, they judge from a variety of circumstances not to be attainable, while they apprehend a trifling and half measure, without insuring any permanent advantage, would be an inlet to endless fluctuation. Could then any practicable and efficient plan be devised, the most serious opposition would cease. And, were it neither a violent nor a wanton deviation from the present forms, the gradual concurrence of all parties would not be a very unreasonable expectation.

With such views was the following scheme drawn out, and for such purposes it is offered to your attention :

An Outline of a Reform of Parliament.

The first step is, to determine what constitutes an adequate and efficient system of representation.

The next, to point out the mode by which it is proposed to be effected.

The last, to shew the agreement of the means proposed with the conditions required.

An adequate and efficient system of representation must include the eight following particulars*:

1. A clear and full expression of the sense of the people.
2. The extension of the right of election, to at least as many as may be sufficient to ascertain this sense.
3. Such a qualification to constitute an elector, since that privilege cannot be extended to all, as may yet be attainable by all.

* A perfect representation of a whole people, in the strict sense of the word, is impossible. It cannot be of all the individuals in a nation, but only of persons of some particular description, as of all of a certain age, and possessed of a certain property. Instead then of fruitless attempts to introduce universal suffrage, the enquiry should rather be, what particular description of voters will best express the general sense.

4. Such a precise and uniform criterion of this qualification, as may be liable to no ambiguity.

5. Simplicity and regularity, both in the construction and movements of the representative body, and also in the mode of election.

6. Such a permanent principle for its basis, as constantly to correct any inequality arising in the course of time.

7. A tendency to encrease, rather than destroy the virtue both of the Elector and the Representative.

8. And, lastly, in the particular case of Great Britain, such a plan as may facilitate the abolition of the old one.

To accomplish these ends, the following scheme is proposed :

1. The right of voting to belong to every person assessed to the window tax.

2. Great Britain to be divided into 279 districts, each to return two representatives, and to contain as nearly as possible the same number of Electors *.

* Thus, the number of Members in the House of Commons, would continue the same as at present.

3. An exception to the two preceding articles to be made with regard to London, where the districts should comprehend a larger number of houses, but the right of voting belong only to those assessed at so many windows, as to reduce the number of electors to the same with that in the other districts.

4. The names of all assessed to the window tax to be given in by the collectors to a register office appointed for such purpose in every district.

5. None to be permitted to poll without a certificate from this office.

6. Upon delivery of this certificate, a sum, not exceeding one shilling to be paid for defraying the expence of the poll, publishing lists of the voters, and other incidents.

7. A third of the representative body to go out annually, on a certain day, and according to a settled rotation of the districts; and not to be eligible again till after an interval of three years.

8. Their successors to be regularly chosen

on a stated day, and a fortnight previous to the old member's going out*.

9. The election always to be finished in one day: and this to be effected by equal subdivisions of the districts, in each of which the poll should be carried on at the same time, and by house-holders belonging to the same; and none permitted to vote but in their own subdivision marked upon their certificate†.

10. In any district when the voters should amount to 100 above the fixt number, the excess to be added to the next adjoining district or districts, and should the voters in these either before or with this addition exceed the due proportion by the same or a greater number, these to be reduced in like manner, by an-

* Were the secession to take place on the 15th of October, the election would fall on the first, when the harvest may be considered as generally over, and the days not too short for the purpose of public meetings.

† Were the subdivisions not to contain more than 500, and were the returning officers to be the clergymen in each, assisted by the churchwardens and overseers, the names and persons of all the voters would be known to those who conducted the poll, the expence trifling, and the whole might be concluded in a day with the most perfect regularity.

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nexing the surplus to the districts adjoining to them*.

11. No election treats, nor any election meeting to be allowed, where each person present did not bear his proportion of the expence.

12. No cognizance to be taken of bribes given or received, nor any other qualification of the representative required than a certificate from the returning officers, of his being elected by a majority of the district.

13. For a certain period no elector should be allowed to exercise his right of voting, without paying annually a sum not exceeding five shillings, to raise a fund for indemnifying the proprietors of private boroughs.

14. This temporary and optional tax to be collected at the same time with the window duty, and to be paid into the register office of the district.

15. Lastly, whilst this tax continued, no certificate to be delivered from the above office

* Let the letters of the alphabet represent the order of the districts. Suppose N too large, add the excess to M and O; if the M and O by this encrease become too large, add their excess to L and P, and thus by degrees a general equality will be produced.

without such arrears as were due being first paid, nor when these arrears extended to above one year, nor within six weeks of the day of election, except to such as had previously paid the full amount of the tax *.

What remains, is to examine how far this scheme corresponds with what is essential to an adequate and efficient representation.

First, then, it is obvious, that an assembly chosen by so numerous a body as a majority of those who are assessed to the window tax, must fully express the sense of the people, not indeed of any particular class, but of all in general ; for in whatever department men may be, civil, military, or clerical, commercial or professional, of landed or personal property, they are all included in Householders.

The qualification also of an Elector is such as, by common industry, is open to all ; and of course, the three first conditions are complied with.

This plan, indeed, excludes lodgers from a vote, but out of London they are not very nu-

† These restrictions seem necessary to make the tax efficient, as otherwise few would qualify when there was no probability and a contest.

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merous, the disability too is partly optional, and the right could not be extended generally to them, without rendering the qualification indeterminate. But yet, should it seem to bear hard upon the army, as possibly it may, the commissioned officers might, without any inconvenience, be allowed to vote in the district where the regiment was quartered; or if upon the Members of the Inns of Court, they too might be admitted to the same privilege, upon paying the assessment necessary to qualify a voter for London or Westminster.

The exception which follows, with regard to London, is founded on equity: both on account of the many advantages and superior energy which it possesses, as the permanent seat of Government; and because a less number of representatives than its full proportion would be sufficient for the protection of its rights, as from the common union of local interests in its several districts, they may be expected to act much more in concert, than Members of distant and widely separated departments, who have no other bond of connexion than the general good.

While on this principle the districts of London are to be larger, the number of voters,
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by requiring a higher qualification, is not increased ; and the confusion that might otherwise arise from such a concourse of people is prevented.

Should objections be started to this deviation from a general rule, let it be considered that the object is not to form a new, but to regulate and give perfection to the leading principle of our present Constitution. And if any prejudice should be conceived against the division into districts, it might be lessened by naming the district (as in most cases would be possible) from the city or borough within it, and by reflecting that it is similar to the most ancient remnant of our Government, the hundreds and tythings of Alfred.

The three next articles of the scheme (4, 5, 6,) seem to establish such a criterion of the right to vote as could be liable to no ambiguity, which forms the fourth requisite. It rests in the person who pays the tax, which those who collect it could absolutely ascertain, and who afterwards is registered, and produces a certificate of the same, upon coming to poll. Female householders might be permitted to nominate and register a substitute, who should be entitled to vote in their right.

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From the want at present of some general and obvious principle, to constitute the qualification of an Elector, many places, it is notorious, are either improperly or not at all represented, during the greater part of a parliament, and much of the public time most unprofitably wasted in settling controverted elections, not to notice the ruinous and impolitic expence in which the candidates are involved.

The seventh article is calculated to preserve the simplicity and regularity which is stated to be necessary in the construction and movements of the representative body. In the construction, by the division into districts, a thing most easy in execution, as the returns of the assessors would at once determine the number of those qualified to vote in every county and hundred: In the movements, by the annual secession of a part, instead of a total dissolution at no settled period; by which means the Assembly would be preserved from the fluctuation and disorder incident to popular bodies; and not only approach to the form, but possess the purity of triennial, and maintain, without any corrupt dependancy, all the boasted consistency of septennial Parliaments. For this rotation not only supersedes the present

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abrupt mode of dissolving parliaments, a practice not very consistent with the regularity of a well constituted Legislature, and which, besides the temporary confusion, and interruption of labour, wears too much the appearance of taking a nation by surprise ; but also, by rendering those who go out for a certain period ineligible, prevents the possibility of acquiring such an undue ascendancy, as might render the Assembly the instrument of one or more individuals, rather than the expression of the general will. And further, by thus intimately blending the interest of the representative with that of his constituents, petitions, or remonstrances would seldom or never occur ; a right to present which, invaluable as it is, must always in the exercise be accompanied, in proportion to the supposed magnitude of the grievance complained of, with a greater or less disturbance of civil order.

To this plan of rotation, however, there are two very strong objections :

The first, is the unavoidable exclusion of men of great talents and virtue, for a limited period, from the Legislative Assembly. But, it may be answered, that a Government is imperfect in the same proportion as its continuance,

nuance, and the blessings resulting from it, depend in the life or abilities of any individual; and that, where extraordinary talents are necessary to supply the deficiencies of any Constitution, there is always an equal danger that they may act in a contrary direction, that they may convulse or destroy. Besides, though suspended as Legislators, in which capacity an indissoluble union of interests between them and the people is the chief requisite, (a union most completely secured by this proposed return of the Representative into the body of his constituents, and his continuance in that class for a certain period) yet are they not precluded from acting in other departments, and as Ministers, the field which particularly calls for eminent abilities. And, were the great Offices of State rendered incompatible with a seat in parliament, or were those who filled them to sit there ex officio, like the Judges, only to give information when called upon, but without being permitted to vote or debate, not only the separation of powers would be better preserved, but public business greatly accelerated by the prevention of that cabal and intrigue, the management of which en-

grosses at present so large a share of ministerial attention.

The other objection is still more plausible, that a total change is more likely than a partial one to remedy any corruption, or correct any error of the Representative Assembly. But its real force depends on the solution of the two following questions: Whether, after providing against the inroads of all undue influence, as here attempted, a regular secession of a third part, on a stated day every year, is not preferable to the perpetual fluctuation that might be apprehended from an annual change of the whole? And, whether the sense of the nation is not more likely to be expressed by this annual influx of a portion of new Members, than by admitting Parliaments of longer duration, and trusting to the executive power to dissolve them when they either were corrupt or in opposition to the will of their constituents: to say nothing of the possibility of their coming to an untimely end from not concurring with the views of the Minister. In short, where such Assemblies, from the length of time for which they are elected, or from any other circumstances, are liable to become venal, a discretionary power of dissolution may

may be a national benefit ; but, under a more perfect representation, it ought not to be allowed, without the specific evil being pointed out which it is intended to remedy.

The simplicity and regularity of the representative body, thus secured by the seventh article, are, by the two next, extended to the election of it: the time, place, and mode, with the qualification of the voter, and every other circumstance, being previously fixt according to a precise and general rule.

The tenth gives the permanency that is laid down as essential to the plan, and by enacting that the change in each district should vary with the respective population, supersedes the necessity of new modelling it to correct the alterations produced by the lapse of years..

The eleventh and twelfth articles are, in various ways, favourable to another part of the plan, the preservation of the morals both of the representative and constituent. On this scheme, the political consequence of the son, while living under the same roof with his father, being nothing, he would have an additional motive to an early settlement in life. By the absolute prohibition of public feasts, to which

which each person present should not contribute his share, much riot and intemperance would be prevented. To bribe so numerous a body of electors would be a vain attempt, or were it practicable, no precautions against it could be of any avail. The necessity therefore of the election oath, such a fruitful source of perjury, would cease, and the virtue of the representative be strengthened from the conviction that he could obtain a seat in the Legislature on no other ground than general esteem. The evil influence of property would be destroyed, which commences when it is compelled to act covertly and partially, and that due weight, which it always ought to have, would be effectually secured. For the man of fortune, and particularly if it consisted in houses *, the property which bears the greatest burdens of

* It may possibly be objected, that, on this plan, in great towns, and particularly in London, builders would acquire an over-ruling influence in Elections. But, it may be observed, that men in this line generally dispose of their houses as soon as finished, in order to enter into fresh speculations, or if they are able to retain them, they become men of real property, and rank with other great Landlords. But, were it probable, that this class would have an undue weight, it might be prevented by precluding all houses from giving a qualification, till they had been built three years or more.

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the state, would have a proportionate influence, and not by unworthy means, but from the respect of his tenants and neighbourhood. And this respect might probably be encreased from the inducement to live among them during the time that he could not sit in Parliament. Let me further add, that an open poll is preferable to a secret ballot, as a reward and incentive to a liberal and honourable conduct in the candidate, and as productive of a more manly and open principle of action in the elector.

Lastly, the remaining articles of this scheme provide for the abolition of that at present subsisting, by furnishing a compensation for the extinction of private and family boroughs, to the several proprietors, and this in a manner the most equitable; for though the right of voting is so widely extended, the tax is confined to such as actually exercise it.

With a rough calculation of the efficiency of the fund resulting from the proposed tax, I shall conclude this letter.

Let the total number of houses assessed to the window tax, be 810,000 *.

Let

* From a return made to Parliament in 1785, the number of such houses in England appeared to be 714,911, which, from the increase of buildings since that period, must be considerably less

Let London, with such a circuit as would comprehend 150,000 assessed houses, return 30 members, or be divided into 15 districts, each containing 10,000 assessed houses.

The remainder, therefore, of the assessed houses 660,000 must return 528 members that the House of Commons may continue to consist of the same number as at present, or be divided into 264 districts each containing 2,500 assessed houses.

As the London districts, though larger, are to contain only the same number of electors, of the 150,000 assessed houses within the circuit of the metropolis only 37,500, or 15 times 2,500, will qualify their occupiers to vote.

The total number of electors in Great Britain will therefore be only 697,500. An annual tax, therefore, of five shillings a head on each elector would produce 174,375*l.* and if the perpetuity of a borough be worth 20,000*l.* the

less than the present amount. No return was made from Scotland, yet supposing the population only one sixth of that of England, and the principle of the tax the same, the number of assessed houses would be 119,152. These, added to the former, make the total of Great Britain 834,063. Of course the estimate assumed above, may be reasonably presumed much below the truth.

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above sum would purchase very nearly nine boroughs: or were six only bought annually, and the overplus applied to defray the interest, to which the proprietors of such as remained unpurchased would be entitled, the continuance of the tax would certainly not be very long, and, from the claims given in, its precise duration might be determined.

I remain Sir,

with much respect, yours, &c.

M. POPPLE.

above than would purchase very early nine
bottles: or were they only bought annually,
and the overplus applied to defray the interest
to which the property of their is transferred
unquestionably would be entitled, the con-
sequence of this but would certainly not be very
long, and their operations given in its price
duration might be determined.

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